United Nations A/55/510

General Assembly

Distr.: General
20 October 2000

Original: English

Fifty-fifth session
Agenda item 97
Training and research

United Nations Institute for Training and Research

Report of the Secretary-General*

I. Introduction

1. The present report has been prepared in compliance with General Assembly resolution 54/229 of 22 December 1999 on the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR). Principal issues addressed in the resolution were the strengthening of inter-institutional cooperation, the systematic utilization of UNITAR by United Nations funds and programmes, the need for continuity in the management of UNITAR and the facilities to be granted for the maintenance of UNITAR's offices.

II. Improving institutional cooperation and partnerships

2. As detailed in the report of activities covering the period 1 July 1998-30 June 2000 submitted by the Executive Director of UNITAR,[1] the programmes have remained steady and sustained. Some 120 different programmes, seminars and workshops have been organized throughout the world each year since 1996. More than 5,500 participants are now benefiting from UNITAR's training and capacity-building activities annually.

3. The policy of focusing project delivery on a limited number of well-identified "niches" in which UNITAR enjoys expertise and sound track records, introduced as part of the restructuring process, has been continued. In response to the second parameter of the policy, development and strengthening of institutional cooperation within and outside the United Nations system, UNITAR has established cooperational links with most programmes and funds of the Organization and agencies of the United Nations system.

4. The network of partnership with national and regional academic and specialized centres has been expanded, particularly in Africa. The recruitment of experts and resource persons from developing countries and countries with economies in transition has also been growing, facilitating increasing exchange of expertise and experience at regional and interregional levels.

5. Research on the design and development of new pedagogic methodologies has continued. This includes new technologies for country-driven need assessments and preparation and diffusion of tailor-made training materials. A collective effort by all programme coordinators at UNITAR is being made, in cooperation with other entities of the United Nations, to develop progressively distance learning, including e-training.

6. The General Assembly, in paragraph 9 of resolution 54/229, encouraged the Board of Trustees to

* The footnote requested by the General Assembly in resolution 54/248 was not included in the submission.

00-70399 (E) 281000

consider organizing events of the Institute at additional sites, including the cities hosting regional commissions, in order to promote greater participation and to reduce costs. Unfortunately, lack of sufficient non-earmarked contributions from Member States to the General Fund of UNITAR did not allow the launch of programmes having costs covered by the General Fund.

III. Systematic utilization of UNITAR

7. The General Assembly, in resolution 54/229, paragraph 10, requested the Secretary-General, in consultation with the Institute and with United Nations funds and programmes, to continue to explore ways and means systematically to utilize the Institute in the execution of training and capacity-building programmes. Significant progress has been made in this respect. UNITAR is conducting a major training and capacity-building programme funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Possibilities for developing and enlarging such undertakings are encouraging. Moreover, since last year UNITAR has been conducting programmes funded by the United Nations Foundation and the United Nations Foundation for International Partnerships, either directly or through the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) or UNDP.

8. The Secretary-General will continue to encourage funds and programmes of the Organization to make the best possible use of UNITAR's competence in the field of training and capacity-building. The potentialities are many and increasing for the design of joint activities in the field, in Geneva and in New York.

9. The financial situation of UNITAR has improved but remains fragile. The funding of Special Purpose Grants is satisfactory. It is worth noting that several industrialized countries that had discontinued their support to UNITAR are resuming their grants to Special Purpose Projects.

10. However, the voluntary contributions to the General Fund remain insufficient. With the restoration of UNITAR's credibility and the relevance and usefulness of its programmes being generally recognized, the Secretary-General expects that developed countries, in particular, will resume their contributions.

IV. Continuity in the management of UNITAR

11. At its thirty-eighth session, held in Geneva from 26 to 28 April 2000, UNITAR's Board of Trustees reiterated its concern that the level of the Executive Director's post, commensurate with his responsibilities, should be upgraded. This matter is under review by the Secretary-General.

12. In the meantime, in response to the call in General Assembly resolution 54/229 for continuity in the management of the Institute, the Secretary-General has extended the appointment of the Executive Director beyond the age of retirement.

V. Provision of additional facilities to the Institute

13. The Secretary-General has taken note of the General Assembly's renewed call to him to continue to explore all possible ways and means to provide additional facilities to the Institute for maintaining its offices (Assembly resolution 54/229, para. 12).

14. In the light of that request and mindful of the conclusions and recommendations reached by the UNITAR Board of Trustees at its thirty-eighth session, the Secretary-General has continued to review the matter. The Secretary-General has determined that no additional considerations have emerged to warrant a deviation from established policy and practice, as detailed in his note on the rental of United Nations premises by press and other entities (A/C.5/54/25). The Secretary-General is of the opinion that he is bound by the established practice, which is based on the fundamental principle of not burdening the regular budget with expenditures incurred by extrabudgetary programmes. Given the conflicting nature of General Assembly mandates, the matter is at an impasse and the Secretary-General would require authorization from the Assembly to waive rental and maintenance costs for the premises occupied by UNITAR in Geneva and New York.

15. In the event that the General Assembly wishes to proceed in this manner, the Secretariat stands ready to provide information regarding the charges incurred so far that have remained outstanding and the estimated expenses that will be incurred on a yearly basis.

Notes

[1] Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 14 (A/55/14).